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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

2024 Volume II: A History of Black People as Readers: A Genealogy of Critical Literacy

Inspiration via Critical Literacy: Filling Gaps in the Canon

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“Hey, did we forget to invite someone?” – all of canonical literature

How do we acknowledge and encourage our students’ questions about why they don’t see people who look or sound like them in the texts they encounter throughout their academic journey? Paulo Freire, Toni Morrison, and many, many English teachers I know would recommend promoting a classroom culture in which those questions are at the heart of what it means to be a reader. This is critical literacy. Join me and my students as we learn how Black creatives have read critically and responded to the ways in which they were not represented by the canon. Explore texts from Alice Walker, Lorraine Hansberry, Ken Harper, Charlie Smalls, and other monumental Black writers, thinkers, and creators that have addressed the gaps they found in what they read and viewed. Encourage your students to question what they read and the authors who produce that content by showing them examples of others who have done the same. Allow them to participate in research through which they can connect with other intellectuals who knew to question the world around them, and create when they found the answers lacking.

(Developed for English Language Arts, grade 7; recommended for English Language Arts, grades 7-12)

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